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ABSTRACT

Henri Matisse (1869-1954) is recognized as one of the great artists of the twentieth century. The paintings and drawings that he executed in Morocco in 1912 and 1913 reveal a pivotal stage in the artist's career. His Moroccan paintings have been compared to an interior journey taking place side by side with the outer one. This packet includes background information on Matisse's life and travels; eight slide images that also are reproduced in black and white in the guide; descriptions of the exemplars and suggested student activities; selected references; and an abbreviated guide to Morocco with a brief glossary of Islamic and Moroccan terms. (MM)

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MATISSE IN MOROCCO

The Paintings and Drawings, 1912–1913

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TEACHERS' PACKET

Education Division
National Gallery of Art, Washington

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MATISSE IN MOROCCO
The Paintings and Drawings, 1912–1913

a USA/USSR Joint Project

TO THE TEACHER

Henri Matisse (1869–1954) is recognized as one of the great artists of the twentieth century. The paintings and drawings he executed in Morocco in 1912 and 1913 (almost all of which were on exhibition at the National Gallery of Art from March 18 through June 3, 1990) reveal a pivotal stage in the artist's career. His Moroccan paintings have been likened to an interior journey taking place side by side with the outer one. This packet is a means of taking students along on Matisse's journey.

IN THE PACKET

You will find:

- background information on Matisse and his Moroccan experience with suggested general activities.
- a chronology of Matisse's life and travels.
- eight slides of works by Matisse.
- descriptions of the eight works with suggested activities.
- selected references.
- abbreviated guide to Morocco with a short glossary of Islamic and Moroccan terms.

ACTIVITIES

Activities are suggested in a broad manner, without referring to an age group. Questions may be directed to students at many different levels, but you will need to adapt these projects to your classroom or invent new activities:

- show the slides in your classroom.
- become familiar with Matisse and the works of art by reviewing the background information and descriptions.
- choose a regular time during the week to look at and discuss just one or two works.
- guide your students through the process of exploring what they see.

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Matisse and His Moroccan Experience

Henri Matisse was a founder of modern art during the first decade of the twentieth century. Throughout his long career, he continued to experiment and to develop his art. He employed a variety of styles ranging from impressionism to abstraction. First and foremost a painter, Matisse also produced sculpture, prints, book illustrations, and costume and stage designs. Late in life, he created works of art by cutting pieces of painted paper into shapes and pasting them onto a surface (the "paper cut-outs"). And toward the end of his life, Matisse executed a total work of art—the Chapel of the Rosary at Vence, France, where he alone designed everything from the priests' robes to the stained glass windows.

As an innovator, Matisse's most significant achievement was to use color freely, employing it to further expression or design. Relationships of one color to another were vital to him. He described how the choice of two colors committed him to select a third that would harmonize with them—and so on until he had achieved the effect of total harmony.

In 1908, Matisse explained his goals and approach in the following words:

> What I am after, above all, is expression. . . . I am unable to distinguish between the feeling I have for life and my way of expressing it.
>
> Expression, to my way of thinking, does not consist of the passion mirrored upon a human face or betrayed by a violent gesture. The whole arrangement of my pictures is expressive. The place occupied by figures or objects, the empty places around them, the proportions, everything plays a part. Composition is the art of arranging in a decorative manner the various elements at the painter's disposal for the expression of his feelings. . . . All that is not useful in the picture is detrimental. A work of art must be harmonious in its entirety: for superfluous details would, in the mind of the beholder, encroach upon the essential elements.

Matisse's sentiments reflect an attitude fundamental to modern art. That is, the artist creates not a mere copy of the physical world but something new, an object possessing its own internal logic and significance. The modern painter, for instance, is often more concerned with the arrangement of colors and shapes on a flat surface than with fidelity to the appearance of external reality.

The main thrust of Matisse's art was toward simplification and decoration. His aesthetic of decoration had no equivalent in the Western tradition of painting, for decoration in the West traditionally was relegated to the minor arts. The artisan, not the artist, got involved with the so-called "decorative arts." Among artists immediately preceding Matisse, Paul Gauguin took a different position. Gauguin made ceramics, carved doors, and designed costumes. By viewing the Orient's decorative art as worthy of study, Gauguin helped to change the way people in the West referred to Oriental art, but it was Matisse who wholeheartedly embraced the aesthetic of non-Western art.

In developing an aesthetic of decoration, Matisse made Islamic art his crucial point of reference. Islamic ceramics provided elements vital to Matisse. Their colors were pure, arabesque lines predominated, and objects were rendered as flat rather than three-dimensional. Oriental carpets also fulfill an important role in Matisse's work. Matisse made the carpet an active principle of design: in his painting he spread the carpets' patterns beyond their borders, thus transforming realistic representations into decorative images in which the arrangement of colors provides aesthetic satisfaction.

From the beginning of his career as an artist, Matisse viewed painting as an escape from disturbance. "When I started to paint," he wrote, "I felt transported into a kind of paradise. . . . In everyday life I was usually bored and vexed by the things that people were always telling me I must do. Starting to paint I felt gloriously free, quiet and alone." Not only in the act of painting but in his finished work, and in his life as well, Matisse sought to exclude anything irritating or oppressive. "What I dream of," he said, "is an art of balance, of purity and serenity devoid of troubling or disturbing subject matter . . . like a comforting influence, a mental balm—something like a good armchair in which one rests from physical fatigue."

Something of Matisse's imaginary ideal was provided by southern lands, particularly those bounded by the Mediterranean. The artist was forever heading south. But Morocco held a special attraction to him. Matisse made two extended visits to Morocco during 1912 and 1913. Altogether, he stayed there seven months, during which time he produced some two dozen paintings and more than sixty drawings. To realize the significance of his Moroccan sojourn, we must understand Matisse's artistic development up to that time.

After a long training and experiments in impressionism and neo-impressionism, Matisse came to prominence as one of the fauves ("wild beasts"), a name applied derisively to a group of painters exhibiting at the 1905 Salon d'Automne in Paris. "Wild beasts" referred to the way in which these painters employed color. They completely ignored the color we "see" in nature in favor of a color expressing their reactions to the subject before them. Fauvism as a movement was a short-lived phenomenon, but it was revolutionary in that it pointed toward an art made solely of color, which need not imitate the natural world. Matisse's later practice was, in a sense, an extension of the discoveries of 1905. In the decades that followed, however, he tended to clarify and simplify his art, on the one hand, and to enliven it by means of decoration on the other hand.

Like the impressionists, Matisse felt obligated to work before nature, but, unlike them, he disliked variable weather. Changing weather conditions interfered with his need to construct something stable and permanent. What Matisse sought were conditions of light provided by the sun's constant presence. Those conditions he found in Morocco. When it rained there or when the weather changed, he vociferously complained in cards and letters to friends.

The light of Morocco captivated Matisse. It was a light that seemed to exist nowhere else. Matisse described a "mellow light, not at all like the French Riviera." According to the description in a travel book that had greatly impressed Matisse, the intense light of Morocco sharply delineated the slightest details of an object but separated objects from one another by "a kind of luminous mist" making them appear "suspended in the air." Morocco's light also flattened objects even more dramatically than did the light of southern France. Perhaps as a result, Matisse painted some of his most "Islamic" pictures—the only ones in his work that might pass, except for their size, as the work of a non-Western artist.

Along with the light, Morocco's vegetation had a profound effect on Matisse. Struck by its color and luxuriance, Matisse described a field of grass through which he had ridden as "something exquisite," and he found the same extraordinary green in all the places he visited in and around Tangier. In the form of ceramic tiles, green also covered the walls and minarets of the Grand Mosque as well as the English church in Tangier. Memory of that green, coupled with the blue of the sky, inspired Matisse many decades later. When he tiled the roof of the Chapel of the Rosary with blue ceramics, he explained that he had seen in Morocco that "blue goes well with grass, it brings out the green."

The profusion of flowers also delighted Matisse. In the case of flowers, the faithful representation of nature appealed to his decorative aesthetic because the floral hues could be seen as pure, abstract color. This was especially true in Morocco, where flowers bloomed in such abundance that travelers before Matisse likened the earth there to carpets of flowers.

The main influence of the Moroccan sojourn on Matisse's art was a transformation of manner. The fierceness evident in Matisse's art before 1912 gave way afterward, for the most part, to a more tender mood. In addition, the Moroccan interlude helped to foster Matisse's identification of plants with humans. In earlier years, he had quoted an Oriental master's advice to the artist drawing a tree—to feel himself rising with it. Increasingly, Matisse came to believe that in order to pass from a naturalistic rendering to an abstract or decorative one, he must discover the plant or flower hidden within the human model before him.

A Chronology of Matisse's Life

1869	Born December 31 at Le Cateau-Cambrésis (Nord) in Picardy.
1887–1889	Studied law in Paris. Became a clerk in a law office.
1890	Began painting while convalescing from appendicitis. Attended early morning classes in drawing at an art school.
1892–1897	Abandoned law. Became an art student in Paris.
1898	Began to paint in a variety of styles influenced mainly by Paul Cézanne.
1904	Spent the summer with Paul Signac at Saint-Tropez. Experimented with the neo-impressionist technique.
1905	Spent the summer with André Derain at Collioure. Together with associates exhibited at the Salon d'Automne a group of pictures that earned them the name of the fauves ("wild beasts").
1907	Went to Italy, visiting Padua, Florence, Arezzo, and Siena. Admirers organized a school where he taught in Paris.
1910	Traveled to Munich to see the exhibition of Islamic art and to Spain.
1911	Painted in Seville (Spain), at home in Issy-les-Moulineaux, and in Collioure. Visited Moscow to see his Russian patron and studied Russian icons.
1912–1913	Two trips to Morocco. Exhibition in Paris of Moroccan paintings and sculptures.
1922	Henceforward divided the year between Nice (winter) and Paris (summer).
1930	Visited Tahiti and the United States.
1938	First independent paper cut-out. Moved to Cimiez, a suburb of Nice.
1941	Illness (duodenal cancer) requiring two serious intestinal operations. Thereafter often painted and drew in bed or in wheelchair.
1948	Began work on the design and decoration of the Chapel of the Rosary for the Dominican nuns at Vence. Worked on large paper cut-outs.
1951	Completion and consecration of the Vence chapel, which he viewed as the culmination of his life's work. First oil paintings since 1948. Worked on paper cut-outs and large brush drawings.
1954	Died at age eighty-four on November 3 in Nice.

General Activities

Familiarize your students with the dimensions of color—hue, saturation, and value—and examine the physiological and psychological properties of color. You may want to concentrate on Matisse's use of one color, e.g., green, in the works included in this packet. Be sure to emphasize, however, that even the best reproduction cannot duplicate the color seen in the original work of art.

Discuss with your students the many ways in which an artist can represent space: perspective (both linear and atmospheric), color, overlapping, placement, and so forth. Compare the space of Matisse's works with that of Persian miniatures.

Look at the designs of decorative objects. You can use wallpaper samples, quilts, patterned shirts or skirts, scarves, ties, rugs, vases, lamps, or similar items. Ask your students to describe how motifs derived from nature differ from the "real thing" in color and in shape, and to discuss how the designer arranged motifs in space.

Investigate the geography of Matisse's travels and moves. In northern France, **locate:**

Picardy, the region in which the artist was born.

Paris, where he established his reputation.

Then, **trace** the artist's development along the Mediterranean, in:

Collioure (France), where fauvism was born.

Tangier (Morocco), where he executed all but two of the works in our packet.

Nice (France), where he worked for at least half of his career.

Point out:

Tahiti, where Matisse traveled in 1930.

In 1911, Matisse visited Moscow. **Locate:**

Moscow and **Leningrad**, where many of the Moroccan paintings are now in important museum collections.

Explore Morocco and its culture. Matisse's paintings and drawings in Morocco (all reproduced and discussed fully in the exhibition catalogue) constitute an almost ethnographic study of Moroccan costume. His drawings show the landscape and architecture of Tangier. Read the travel book by Pierre Loti (see **Selected References**) that influenced Matisse. For further information on Morocco, contact: Miss Naima Amahboub, Cultural Attachée, Embassy of the Kingdom of Morocco, 1601 21st Street, N.W., Washington, D.C. 20009, 202/462-7979, ext. 53.

Explore the notion of travel and travelers. Matisse sent postcards from Morocco to many friends. Why do people send postcards? Suggest that your class look at the ways in which an explorer, a traveler, and a tourist might write about the students' hometown. What scenes would they select from an imaginary postcard rack? What would these people say on postcards to their friends?

Produce a play or performance based on a Moroccan folktale or legend. See the Barton entry in **Selected References** for a readymade play, or devise your own. Let the colors of Matisse guide you in creating costumes. Regular clothes can be mixed and combined with tights to create striking color contrasts. Students can make their own masks from construction paper.

1
Open Window, Collioure
(La fenêtre)

1905
Oil on canvas, 21¾ x 18⅛ in.
From the Collection of Mrs. John Hay Whitney

This picture was painted before Matisse's trips to Morocco, and exemplifies his fauve style. The open window—by forming a picture within a picture—has attracted artists for many centuries, and it is an important theme in Matisse's art. Here, the window opens onto a balcony above the harbor at Collioure, a small town on the Mediterranean coast. With the French windows thrown open wide, we are just a few steps from the balcony.

The painting, considered to be one of Matisse's masterpieces, was exhibited in the 1905 Salon that gave fauvism its name. The manner of execution explains why "wild beast" (fauve) seemed an appropriate, albeit ironic, characterization of the artist. The subject was an accepted commonplace scene, but its rendering defied tradition altogether. Not only did colors not match up with those of the real world, but they also splotched and splashed across the canvas in fits and starts.

Both inside and outside the room, forms are constructed by means of extreme color contrasts. On the interior walls flanking the window, an intense blue-green to the left opposes an electrifying pink to the right. For all their violent difference in hue, the two nevertheless meet peaceably via a dark blue transom. Individual panes of the window are variously colored, reflecting colors on the opposite walls. Down in the harbor, the boats—thick slabs of purple, orange, and black—are moored by slender orange and purple masts. They list and sway on a pink-white sea that abruptly turns to light blue when it meets the purple-streaked horizon. The riot of color conveys the joyous and heightened mood engendered by the sea and sky on a warm summer's day.

Activities

Consider why the open window appeals to artists. (A picture within a picture that contrasts exterior and interior light.) How would Matisse's view of the harbor look if we removed the window frame? Would the overall mood be different?

Using tissue or construction paper, try constructing a view from your window at home or at school. Change the colors to reflect how you feel about the things you see. Your trees can be blue or orange or even pink. Notice how some colors look brighter together than they do apart.

Describe how certain colors might taste, smell, and feel. For example, would a pink taste more bitter than a purple? Would a green smell sweeter than a red? Would a yellow feel softer than a blue?

2
The Casbah Gate
(Porte de la Casbah)

1912/1913
Oil on canvas, 45⅝ x 31½ in.
State Pushkin Museum of Fine Arts, Moscow

In a variant on the idea of the landscape seen through a window, the horseshoe arch opens like a gigantic keyhole in the thick walls to reveal an airy view beyond. The view beckons not only because the intense pink stream of sunlight flooding the pavement pulls us forward, but also because beyond the massive walls lies the promise of sky, light, air, and mystery as well.

The gate, known as the Bab el Aassa, cuts through the southern part of the wall surrounding the Casbah, the old citadel and highest part of Tangier. We are standing within the walls of the Casbah and looking through the gate down into the Medina, the oldest residential quarter of Tangier. Not far away, pink flowers top a green trellis. Rising from a blue ground in the far distance is the minaret of the Grand Mosque next to a palm tree. Our sole witness is the shadowy figure seated on the left, probably one of the people (*bowaabs*) who even today sit by the gates to observe passersby and often keep the community informed about happenings.

Comparing *Open Window, Collioure* with this painting reveals the differences between Matisse's fauve works of 1905 and his Moroccan paintings of 1912–1913. Whereas the Collioure painting employs contrasting colors applied most often in small, allover brushstrokes to produce a sense of vibration, the Moroccan composition, though still based on contrasting colors, consists of large, flat areas producing a calm effect. The Moroccan painting is also more artificial, or decorative, with strange pink and ocher wedges. Despite their differences, the two paintings are nevertheless similar in that their coherence depends on adjustments of color to produce light. As a result, neither painting imitates light but rather seems to create it

Activities

Imagine that you took a color photograph of the exact view Matisse painted at the same time of day. What time did you choose? How would your photograph differ from the painting? Consider the color and the presence of shadows or detail.

Write a mystery or an adventure story about Matisse's painting. Pretend that you are the *bowaab*, the old man seated by the gate. Imagine what could happen suddenly to break the peace and quiet.

3
On the Terrace
(Sur la terrasse)

1912/1913
Oil on canvas, 45¼ x 39⅜ in.
State Pushkin Museum of Fine Arts, Moscow

Matisse's favorite model in Morocco, the young girl named Zorah, kneels on a carpet in an area secluded from people or anything suggesting a place. Perhaps she is on a rooftop terrace or in the corner of a courtyard. Zorah exists as though in a void, seemingly suspended on the carpet that itself appears to hover in the air. Apart from the vertical lines indicating a corner, the only objects suggesting tangible space are Zorah's slippers (*babouches*) on the left and the large bowl of goldfish on the right. The hot oranges and pinks of the fishbowl have a counterpart, in color, on the opposite side in the bright red insoles of Zorah's slippers. The only brightly colored areas in the painting, the goldfish bowl and slippers, mark, as it were, the base line of a triangular configuration whose vertex is formed by the head of Zorah.

The configuration lends extreme gravity to the young girl. She herself is completely bound by her clothes, from the simple, tight head covering and long gloves to the lozenge-patterned garment enveloping her body in cocoon fashion. She gazes directly ahead but betrays no emotion. Her immobility and lack of expression contribute to the sense that she is an introspective person. The goldfish bowl, though common in Morocco at one time as an object of contemplation, probably figures here as something like Matisse's signature, since he adopted the subject in many paintings.

A luminous blue shadow rakes across the scene, leaving a bright patch of light at the upper left-hand corner. Its triangular shape reflects the implied triangle formed by the objects and Zorah. The Moroccan light described by Matisse as "mellow," "soft," and "deliciously delicate" is the light that we see here. However intense the African light, it does not obliterate objects. The light defines the forms at the same time that it emanates from them and from the air surrounding them.

Activities

There is reason to believe that Matisse wanted this painting of Zorah to hang as the center panel of a group of three paintings. The painting intended for the right side was *The Casbah Gate*, which is included in our packet. Imagine that you had to decide the kind of picture displayed on the left side in order to form a triptych. What subject would you choose? What colors would it have? What kind of light?

Consider why goldfish might be a source of contemplation for some and a favorite motif for Matisse.

4
The Standing Riffian
(Le rifain debout)

1912
Oil on canvas, 57⅝ x 38½ in.
The State Hermitage Museum, Leningrad

Standing against a background of loosely brushed blue and scumbled blue and green, colors that split the painting vertically, a Moroccan man faces the viewer. His proud bearing and fixed gaze almost make us want to step back a little, away from this close encounter.

The man is a Riffian, belonging to a Berber tribe inhabiting the Rif Mountains. With his head wrapped in an ocher and green *rezza*, he wears a loose green garment (*djellaba*), its hood draped over his shoulders to reveal a pale undergarment (*tchamir*) topped by an ornamented green collar tightly encircling his neck. Multicolored bright tufts run down the center of his *djellaba* and appear as intense spots of color on the sleeves and hood. Diagonally crossing the Riffian's shoulder is the yellow strap of a pouch, concealed from our view, for bullets. The artist also omitted the Riffian's customary weapons, the flintlock gun and curved dagger. The Riffians, known as fierce warriors, achieved a reputation for their independence and their habit of kidnapping visitors and foreign residents of Morocco. Only the strongest sultans were able to conquer the Rif tribesmen, who considered it an insult to say that one's father died in his bed.

As if to show equal force with his brightly colored garments, the Riffian's face takes on all the same intense colors. His scarlet forehead rises from planes of ocher defining the cheeks above a green beard and stubbled chin. Matisse described his Riffian subject as having eyes a bit savage, like a jackal. The unsettling reaction produced in the viewer comes in part from the eyes, one of which is averted, but it derives equally from the broad mass of the man's body, disproportionately large relative to his head.

The mottled colors and their intense contrasts also contribute to the Riffian's forceful impact. You will note, though, that the colors are those of nature—the sky, grass, earth, and wild flowers. The colors of the Riffian's costume may have seemed extravagantly bold in the white stuccoed city of Tangier, but in the mountain valleys they allowed him to become like a chameleon, hidden to any attackers.

Activities

Consider the costumes worn by various warriors, focusing on one specific uniform (perhaps the American Indian or contemporary American infantry garb). Does the type of warfare influence the garment? How does color figure in it?

Using dark shades of construction paper and brightly colored crayons, make a mask of your face based on the colors of your clothes today. Combine and juxtapose the colors freely. Choose a particular mood (happy, sad, angry, fierce, etc.) that you would like to express.

5
The Palm
(La palme)

1912
Oil and pencil on canvas. 46¼ x 32¼ in.
National Gallery of Art. Washington. Chester Dale Fund

In Tangier. Matisse often worked in the gardens of a private villa. where he painted *The Palm*. Strictly speaking. this painting is not a landscape. for rather than a general look over the gardens. Matisse confronted the viewer head-on with dense vegetation. barring passage and forcing a view close to the ground. What rivets our attention is actually just one element. the palm frond. whose spreading leaves fan out abruptly and sharply to pierce a space that seems to explode with light.

The drama of the palm leaf occurs against a backdrop of dark. slender tree trunks. one encircled by ivy. and undefined ground cover constructed of thinly painted reds. greens. and grays. With its ambiguous forms and loose brushwork. the painting is close to abstraction. Matisse carefully drew and painted the top half of the composition. but loosely blocked in the lower half with thin washes. For the palm leaf. however. he left the light-colored canvas exposed and over it he painted slivers of green. Where the edge of the leaf encounters shade. Matisse used the handle of his brush in the wet paint to cut and scrape the thin. radiating lines. adding to the impulsive effect.

Matisse evidently painted the work quickly. Later. he remarked that he painted it in a "burst of spontaneous creation—like a flame." Visible remains of pencil underdrawing indicating rough elements of the composition show that as Matisse applied color. he mostly ignored his preliminary drawing.

Activities

It is easy to take for granted Matisse's effects of lightness and elegance without recognizing his discipline and craftsmanship. Look at the many kinds of line. both implied and real. in this painting. How do they balance one another?

Using white paper and green crayons of several different hues. make your own palm leaf. You may want to do as Matisse and draw the pattern first. but. like the famous artist. you don't have to follow the outlines exactly when you start to use your colors. If you want to cut patterns into the thick crayon drawing. you can use a paper clip. an old comb. or the edge of a ruler to scrape away parts of the crayon.

6
Calla Lilies, Irises and Mimosas
(Arums, iris et mimosas)

1913
Oil on canvas, 57¼ x 38¼ in.
State Pushkin Museum of Fine Arts, Moscow

Though Matisse favored the human figure as a subject, throughout his career he painted floral still lifes and included flowers in most of his interior scenes. Greatly impressed by the many flowers blooming in Morocco, he painted three large floral still lifes while there.

Elements of Matisse's hotel room serve here as the backdrop to an arrangement of flowers. From their small vase, stately long-stemmed white calla lilies rise regularly and to the left, while clusters of yellow mimosas swirl playfully to the right. Blue irises partially fill the center gap and occupy spaces around the other flowers. Abandoning the conventional central axis of flower still lifes, the arrangement forms a dynamic V-shape, much like an inverted triangle burst apart at the middle of its base. A large, sharply pointed green leaf sweeps down over the vase, almost obscuring it, to anchor the arrangement on a cloth filled with isolated trails of stylized, swaying leaves. The flowers and the decorated cloth appear against a background of brightly colored curtains. Their panels of purple, green, red, and blue, plain on the left (though some folds look like stripes) and patterned on the right, act as a colorful but stable foil for the expansive flowers.

Matisse's ideal here was something other than the illusion of reality. The artist's invention is seen in the color as well as in the shifting point of view—across toward the vase and down onto the cloth. Matisse avoided any suggestion of brown or black shadow or any hint that forms were modeled by a particular light, such as that coming from an open window. Nor did the artist attempt to simulate the texture of objects. Even though Matisse simplified all elements, leaving out most details, the shapes and colors of the flowers allow us to identify them. In forms much larger than life, they suggest the possibility of a timeless perfection.

Activities

Imagine that Matisse placed the mimosas on the left and the lilies on the right. Or that the middle drapery panel was purple rather than red. How would such changes affect the painting overall?

Using construction paper, make your own flower arrangement. Cut out three flowers and a vase from different colors. Construct a background by gluing together vertical strips of different colors. Notice how your flowers look brighter or duller when placed against certain colors.

Imagine someone you like as a flower. Describe the colors and shapes that person would then have and why he or she reminds you of that particular flower. Is it because of his clothes? Because she is strong? small? tall? lean? hardy? frail? How could you arrange a floral still life composed of three people you like?

7
H. Matisse by Himself
(H. Matisse par lui-même)

1912
Pen and ink on paper. 7⅝ x 10 in.
Private collection

This small sketch reveals Matisse's awareness of himself as an artist working in an exotic and picturesque land. Viewed from the back and seated on a folding stool, with a palette held to the left, the artist holds a brush in front of the portable easel resting on his lap. He is looking at a small, domed building with a large, horseshoe-shaped door capped by a scalloped arch. The structure is a *marabout*, a type of tomb devoted to Muslim saints. Despite the artist's focus in the drawing, our attention strays to the ghostlike figures at the right and left.

Clothed in long, voluminous garments, they, perhaps more than the architecture, remind us that Matisse is in a non-European land. The woman passing by the *marabout* in the right distance is defined simply by a bundle whose trapezoidal void indicates her face. The other, directly behind Matisse, has eyes like spots of coal above her veil. Matisse's European clothes—trousers, tailcoat, and broad-brimmed soft hat—mark him as conspicuously different from the natives.

Even apart from his clothes, Matisse's act of painting signals the Western legacy separating him from Morocco's Islamic tradition. The artist came from a culture where the female nude was a legitimate and proper subject, but he was painting in a place where women covered all but their eyes and fingertips except in the presence of their families. Moreover, the Islamic tradition found any figural representation to be objectionable. Indeed, Matisse's drawings in Tangier place him squarely in the Western tradition. Like many other artists of the period, he was trained to sketch in the street in an attempt to capture, in spontaneous fashion, the life of the times.

In its execution, this self-portrait is typical of the other drawings he made in Tangier. Thick penstrokes define the forms by means of broken contour lines. Squiggles represent natural growth, and curved segments animate the ground. Matisse used no shading or halftones, and masses appear as fairly insubstantial. The white paper becomes synonymous with space and light.

Activities

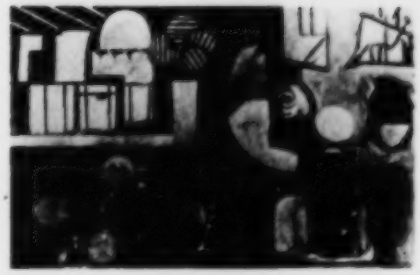
Consider the economy of means employed by Matisse here. In what ways does he suggest that forms are near or far? How does he convey mass by the use of line alone?

Using a blank sheet of paper and a ballpoint (or felt-tipped) pen, draw a picture of yourself in a place you would like to visit. In the picture, draw some of the things that make you think this would be a good place to see. What will you be doing in the picture?

Explore the role of women in the Muslim world and the function of the *haik* (garment). Perhaps you could invite a Muslim woman to discuss her viewpoint with your class.

8
The Moroccans
(Les marocains)

1915–1916
Oil on canvas, 71⅜ x 110 in.
The Museum of Modern Art, New York.
Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Samuel A. Marx



Matisse conceived this painting in an effort to sum up his Moroccan experience some three years after his trips. Back in France, he distilled his memories into three different subjects and presented each as a distinct part of the composition. Two parts occupy the left side. A domed structure (*marabout*) stands among open and closed walls, evoking the architecture of Tangier. A large potted flower with cactus leaves sits atop the corner post of the railing in front of the architecture. Directly below is a display of gourds and watermelons, laid out on latticework suggesting the tiled pavement of a public market. These melons were at one time misidentified as a group of Moroccans touching their foreheads on the ground in prayer. The expressiveness of their abstracted forms easily explains the mistake. Matisse may have even intended such ambiguity.

A complex grouping fills the entire right side of the painting. We can identify a seated, turbaned man shown from the back, but the other forms are uncertain. These shapes are not clearly defined and can suggest any number of Moroccan motifs: a well, a waterpipe, a tea server and platter, a brazier, a goldfish bowl, or an Arab figure. The painting reveals Matisse's preoccupation in 1915–1916 with cubism. Geometric forms dominate, in contrast to the fluid shapes in paintings executed in Morocco. The dome, the whirling leaves of the flower, the spherical melons, and the rounded turban and bodies of the figures all share the same circular motif, helping to unify the painting.

In 1951, Matisse observed that this painting was difficult to describe in words. He said, "It is the beginning of my expression with color, with blacks and their contrasts." The painting's black ground separates the three parts, but black unites them, too, by working its way into various areas of each part. The black, though it serves to depict deep shadow, also refers to light. Matisse wrote of a contemporaneous painting, "I began to use black as a color of light and not as a color of darkness."

Activities

Is there any evidence that Matisse based this work on memory rather than on immediate observation of subjects?

Choose at least five objects around you that range from white to black. Describe the way you would place them so that the white objects become more and more black. Which black objects seem to have more light? Which white objects?

Imagine that three things seen on a trip (or on a visit to someone's house) must explain to your friends what you experienced there. Using construction paper, make those things into simple shapes (people can be sticks or circles; houses can be squares). Then, while keeping each thing separate from the others, put all three together in one picture. How will you make sure we know that the three things belong together?

Selected References

Books about Matisse

FOR GENERAL READERS

Flam, Jack D. *Matisse on Art*. 1973; Paperback. New York, 1978.
English translation of Matisse's major writings plus important interviews and broadcasts given by Matisse. Prefaced by a biography and general introduction.

Gowing, Lawrence. *Matisse*. 1979; Paperback. New York, 1987.
Useful study of Matisse's career and achievements. Includes an extensive chronology of Matisse's life.

Matisse in Morocco. Exhibition catalogue. National Gallery of Art. Washington, 1990.
Essays by three curators and one art critic. Full entries on (and reproductions of) all works in the exhibition.

FOR YOUNG READERS

Munthe, Nelly. *Meet Matisse*. Boston, 1983.
Delightful introduction to Matisse's cut-outs. Includes photographs, text, and related art projects. Ages seven and up.

Raboff, Ernest. *Henri Matisse (Art for Children)*. New York, 1988.
Brief biography and interpretation of Matisse's works. Imaginative presentation.

Books about Fauvism

Leymarie, Jean. *Fauves and Fauvism*. 1959; revised paperback ed. Geneva, 1987.
Brief but comprehensive study with attention to many artists. Lists events year by year. Excellent bibliography.

Books about Morocco (includes travel books and guides)

FOR GENERAL READERS

Dwyer, Daisy Hilse. *Images and Self-Images: Male and Female in Morocco*. New York, 1978.
Valuable anthropological account. Examines chiefly southern Moroccan folktales and society of the southern city of Taroudant. Considers Western stereotypes. Scholarly but appropriate for advanced readers.

Knappert, Jan. *Tales of Mystery and Miracle from Morocco*. Hamilton, New Zealand, 1976.
Folktales and legends.

Loti, Pierre. *Morocco*. New York, 1930.
English translation of *Au Maroc*, a popular travel diary, read with enthusiasm by Matisse, documenting Loti's experiences as he accompanied a French caravan on expedition from Tangier to Fez in the spring of 1889. Available only at libraries. Other English translations published in 1889, 1892, and 1914. Students of French might tackle the original version.

Rogerson, Barnaby. *Morocco*. Paperback. Chester, Conn., 1989.
A Cadogan Guide containing useful, up-to-date summaries of Moroccan history, culture, and places.

FOR YOUNG READERS

Barton, Tony, and Peter Richards. *Khalid the Dreamer, or the Magic Almond: A Play for Children*. London, 1984.
Adaptation of a short story originally published in a collection of folktales from Morocco under the general title *The Storyteller of Marrakesh*. With the help of a magic almond, a poor gardener becomes a respected musician and soldier in the court of a Moroccan king and tries to win the love of a spoiled princess.

Carpenter, Allan, and Janis Fortman. *Morocco*. Chicago, 1975.
Introduction to the geography, history, government, economy, culture, people, and major cities.

Hintz, Martin. *Morocco*. Chicago, 1985.
History, geography, natural history, economy, customs, and people.

Stewart, Judy. *A Family in Morocco*. Minneapolis, 1986.
Text and photographs present the life of twelve-year-old Malika and her family, residents of Tangier.

Other Educational Resources from the National Gallery of Art

Requests for free loan of these programs should be made well in advance of the date scheduled for use. Programs may be kept for five working days. For free catalogue and ordering information, contact the Department of Education Resources, Education Division, National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C. 20565.

Henri Matisse: Paper Cut-Outs. Catalogue #049.
48 slides, 2 cassettes, text, and study reproductions. An exhibition at the National Gallery provided the first comprehensive view of Matisse's work in paper cut-outs. In parts one and two of this program, John Hallmark Neff, one of the curators of the exhibition, speaks about Matisse's methods and about the evolution of his work in cut-and-pasted paper. Excerpts from a lecture by Jack D. Flam on "The Significance of Matisse's Subject Matter" appear in part three. Part four deals with Matisse's *Jazz* portfolio.

Matisse in Nice. Catalogue #VC 204.
½" VHS videocassette (30 minutes).
Produced for the National Gallery in connection with the exhibition *Henri Matisse: The Early Years in Nice*, this program shows the artist's profound response to the light and color of the Mediterranean and the changes that occurred during his years in Nice, on the French Riviera, from 1916 to 1930.

Sources for quotations in text:

1. John Jacobus, *Matisse* (1973; New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1983), p. 23.
2. Lawrence Gowing, *Matisse* (1979; New York: Thames and Hudson, 1987), p. 9.
3. Gowing 1987, p. 58.

Abbreviated Guide to Morocco

Geography

Occupying the northwest corner of Africa, Morocco borders on the Mediterranean as well as the Atlantic. The northern limits are defined by 290 miles of Mediterranean coast from the Strait of Gibraltar to the border of Algeria. The western limits are bounded by 800 miles along the Atlantic Ocean, from the Strait to the border of Mauritania. To the south lies the Sahara and Mauritania. To the east, where there is no clearly recognizable natural break, is Algeria.

Four great mountain chains divide the country from west to east: the Rif Mountains, which rise immediately south of the Mediterranean coast and run parallel to the shore, and the Atlas ranges (Anti-Atlas, High Atlas, and Middle Atlas), which occupy much of central Morocco. Watered by streams from these mountains, most of the coastal plains are exceptionally fertile. The mountains, though, block any ocean moisture from reaching the desert interior.

History

In the eighth century, Arab armies conquered the entire North African seaboard and forcibly brought Islam to Morocco. Ruled throughout the following centuries by competing Islamic dynasties, Morocco fell increasingly under European influence throughout the nineteenth century. In 1912 France established a protectorate and delegated the extreme north and south to Spain. After the Second World War, Mohammed V led the struggle for independence, which was granted in 1956. Mohammed V's son, Hassan II, has been king of Morocco since 1961.

Religion

From the eighth century, the central and most consistent influence on Moroccan history is the Islamic religion. Islam literally means "submission" or obedience to "the divinity" or "the only and true God" (Allah). The Koran is "the recitation," the announcement by the Archangel Gabriel of God's word to the prophet Mohammed. The Archangel appeared to Mohammed in a cave outside Mecca in Arabia. Opposition to the monotheistic teachings of Mohammed forced him to flee Mecca for the city of Medina, where he became ruler and established a theocratic state. His flight to Medina took place on June 15, 622, the date taken as the start of the Hegira, the Muslim era.

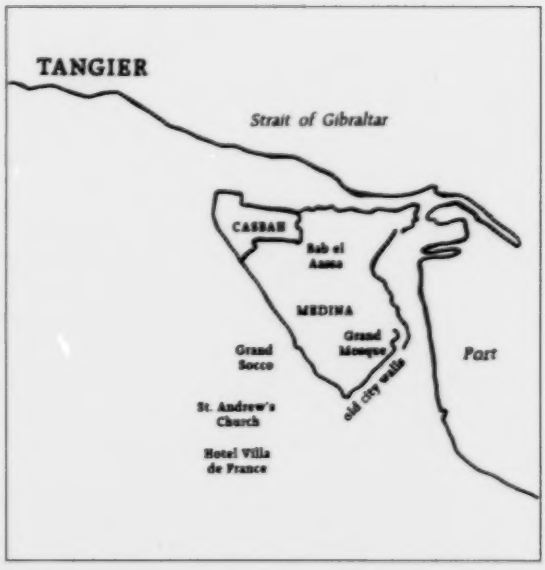
The prophet codified religious life into the five pillars of Islam (prayer five times a day), the pilgrimage to Mecca, the fast of Ramadan, and alms and acceptance that there is no other divinity but God.

Prayers are announced at each mosque by a *muezzin* at four minutes after sunset, at night, at dawn, at noon after the sun has passed its zenith, and midway between noon and sunset. Alone or in a mosque, the believer performs a set ritual of prayer. On Fridays, the noonday prayer must be recited in the Grand, or licensed, Mosque and is followed by a sermon.

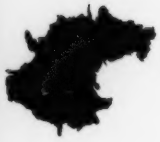
Tangier

Tangier, a bustling port situated on the Strait of Gibraltar, is the oldest continually inhabited city in Morocco. On its north side, gates lead into the Medina, the old walled town. Right outside the walls of the old town is the Grand Socco, a large open circular space ringed by cafés and market stalls. Just above the Grand Socco is the Hotel Villa de France, where Matisse stayed during his visits to Morocco. From his hotel room, he looked directly across at the Anglican church of Saint Andrew's and beyond in the direction of the Medina.

The Medina walls mark the line of the ancient Roman defenses. Within their lower southern limits stands the Grand Mosque. The highest, northernmost part of the Medina is the walled Casbah quarter, which has been the preserve of palaces and castles for thousands of years. It contains the old palace, the Dar el Makhzen (now a museum), whose courtyard is entered through the Bab el Aassa, the "whipping gate." The area immediately around the Bab el Aassa, known as the Place de la Casbah, was formerly the place where criminals were punished and executed.



Short Glossary of Islamic and Moroccan Terms



BAB (bob) gate

BABOUCHE (bah boosh) the distinctive Moroccan slipper

BOWAAB (bow wab) a person who sits by gates to observe people, sometimes paid to report on happenings in the community

BURNOOSE a one-piece hooded cloak

CASBAH the citadel of a town or a rural fortress; also used to describe any defensive building

DAR palace

DJELLABA (jell uh BAH) large cotton or wool outer garment with sleeves and hood

HAIK (hake) large cloth used by women to cover themselves in the street

HORSESHOE ARCH an arch that widens directly above the point from which it springs, sometimes referred to as a keyhole arch; an identifying characteristic of Islamic architecture

MARABOUT (mare uh BOO) holy warrior, ascetic, or the chief of a religious brotherhood who has won the respect of the people; his tomb may be covered by a dome and venerated for as long as devotees remain

MEDINA (muh DEE nah) walled city or old city in distinction to any new European-style quarter, named after the city where Mohammed fled to avoid persecution in Mecca

MINARET slender tower attached to a mosque and surrounded by one or more projecting balconies from which the *muezzin* summons the faithful to prayer; the pinnacle is crowned with domes representing the daily prayers; blue or green flag indicates Friday, the Muslim sabbath

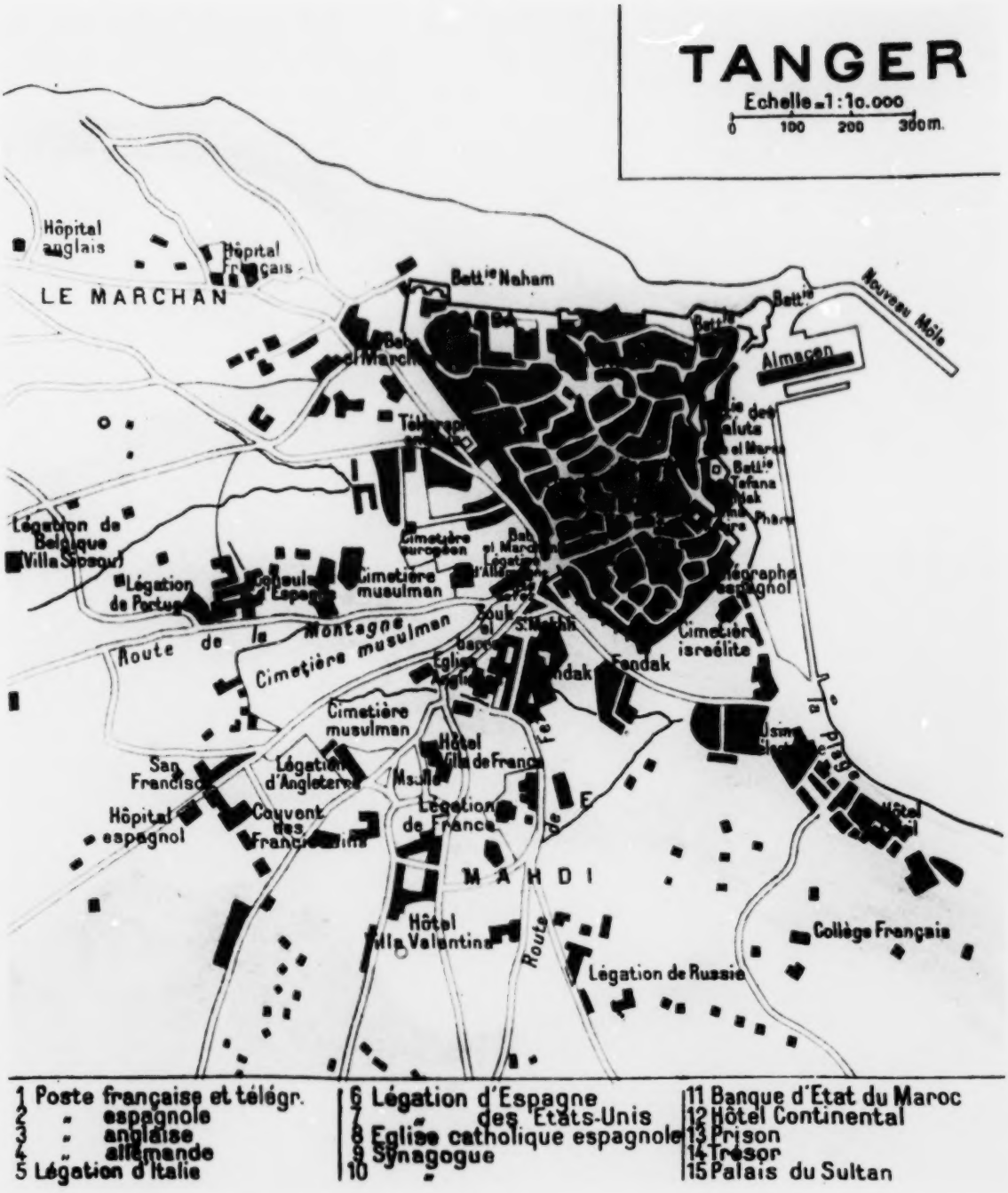
MOSQUE building used by Muslims for public worship; at its most basic a defined space for prayer with a niche indicating which way to direct one's prayers (toward Mecca, the sacred city of the Muslims)

MUEZZIN (MOO ess in) man who announces prayers from the minaret of a mosque

REZZA (REZ ah) head covering

SOUK (soock) marketplace

TCHAMIR (CHAHM meer) robe



Tangier. 1914. Geography and Map Division. Library of Congress

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